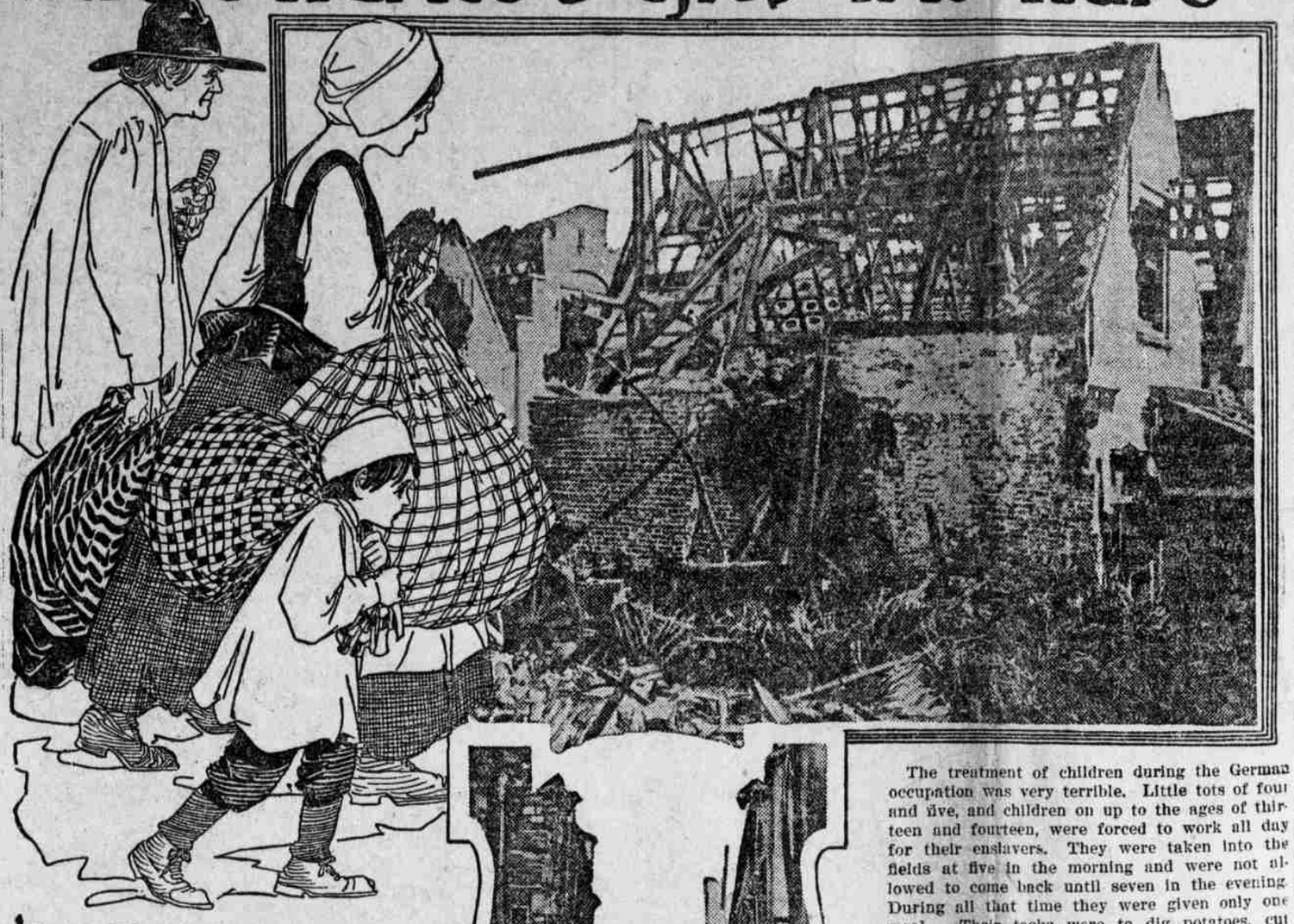
Heroic France Defies the Huns



Comtesse de Bryas is a Frenchwoman, who came to America last April to represent the American committee for devastated France, and is now engaged in an extensive tour of the United States, speaking about her experiences in the war-ridden districts. The comtesse's father is French, but her mother was a Philadelphian who went to Europe when a small child and was brought up there. Her great-grandfathers, George Clymer and Thomas Willing, and her granduncle, George Read, were all signers of the Declaration of Independence, and one of them, George Clymer, was among the six who helped to frame the Constitution.—Editor's Note.

By COMTESSE MADELEINE DE BRYAS.

SOMETIMES meet, in the course of my travels, people who say: "Ah, poor France! Tragic, invaded country!" But to these people I would say: "No, no! You do not know your France. It is not poor France, but noble France. Not tragic France, but heroic France!"

I can best explain my meaning by describing an incident which took place on the occasion of one of the recent air raids on Paris. An air raid is a nerve-racking time. The newspaper accounts and the magazine stories do not tell you one-hundredth of the anguish lived through by the people who crouch in their cellars, listing to bombs that explode close by and expecting all the time that the next missile will demolish the house over their heads.

The favorite gathering places for civilians during air raids is in the cellars. During the raid of which I speak, one of these underground places was crowded with refugees. But they were not moping or trembling. Instead, they were constantly joking and laughing about their predicament. They did not for one second lose their fine courage and stanchness.

When the bombs had ceased to fall, they came up to the street level once more. But they did not breathe great sighs of relief and thank their lucky stars for not being hit. Not they! Their eyes glowed with the fire of unquenched spirit, and they shook their fists in the direction of the departing German airplanes.

"Those fools!" they shouted. "Those fools! They think they can break us! They do not know us! Never shall we yield! Never!"

This is not the only splendid exhibition of French devotion that I have seen with my own eyes. The people in the rural regions are no less determined in their ardor. Although nearly one-fifth of France has been invaded by a ruthless enemy and some portions invaded the second time, these country folk would die rather than give themselves up to the foe.

In a village of the devastated district I found a little old woman who was living alone. She was working at washing linen for the soldiers who were in trenches not far away. Her own house had been burned down by the Germans. She told me her pathetic story.

It seems that a German officer who had a very bad reputation for molesting the civilians had been quartered in her house. After he had been there for a few hours he went to the small stove which heated the house and opened it to put in some wood. But when he put in the stick of wood he allowed the end to protrude, so that, as soon as it began to burn, the fire blazed outward into the room. He then placed a screen near this blazing wood so that it would catch fire. The old woman saw what he was doing and knew that it was his design to burn down her house. He had already burned a house in the next street in the same manner. Knowing that she was powerless to prevent him, and being filled with despair, she fell on her knees before him.

"Spare me!" she entreated of him. "Spare this house and allow me to live here in peace. What have I ever done to you!"

But she had hardly uttered these words when shame overcame her because she was abasing herself before a German. In another instant she had risen to her feet.

"What am I doing!" she exclaimed. "Je suis perdu! I am disgraced. I have entreated a favor from the foe of my native country."

Then she crossed the room before the astonished officer and took up his gun. Placing it in his hands she told him to kill her.

"I deserve no less than death," she said. "I have disgraced France by kneeling to ask a favor of one of her enemies."

Probably the German officer would have killed the woman, but at that moment one of his brother officers came into the house. He must have had a more tender heart, for he took pity on the old woman and put a stop to the proceedings. So her house escaped for the time being. But later on it was burned by other Germans. When I found this woman she was working 18 hours each day washing for the soldiers. I asked her why she worked so hard and she told me that it was because she had nothing left to her in the wide world, and the only way to keep herself from heartbreak was to be always occupied.

The conditions under which most of these people have been living are horrifying. Their houses are heaps of ruins. You can hardly believe the systematic way in which the Germans proceeded to destroy their dwellings. A bomb was thrown into every house along the line of march. The furniture was all broken up or burned, fruit trees were cut down, and the wells polluted. Yet, when the invading tide was swept back these villagers came back at once to their former homes. This devotion of the French peasant to his little home is something which Americans can hardly appreciate. He loves it ardently; it is almost a part of him; he cannot bear to leave it.

During the time when they were struggling to rebuild their shattered homes, these peasants had to live in cellars and dugouts. Of course these places were most unhealthy and not fit to remain in. I once went down into a cellar in which an old couple was living. The roof of the cellar was so low that when I was seated on a little plank talking to the old people I had to stoop. The floor was entirely mud, and the water seeped in through the walls and trickled down in tiny streamlets. In the corner was the straw bed which had been furnished the old couple seven months before. It was indescribably filthy and so damp that one could twist it and wring water out of it. Yet the chief desire of the old woman was for a plate to eat off. The Germans had destroyed their crockery and household utensils and they had only one old metal skillet, in which they cooked and from which they ate.

In one village I saw a mother who had gone back to live in a little shelter which she had built for herself in the corner formed by the only two remaining walls of her dwelling. Over the top of this place she placed planks. One side was open to the weather. The cold, raw weather made it difficult to exist in such a place. I myself have lived in a little wooden building near the front, similar to the barracks in which the soldiers live, and I know the cruel winter weather of these parts of France.

The hardship has been greatest on the little children. Oh, the poor children! They no longer play. They have forgotten all their games. They do not know what it means to run and laugh and be gay. As they walk along the streets you will see them start suddenly and look over their shoulders in a frightened way. So great has been the terror instilled into them by the Germans.

An officer told me of seeing two little children standing against a wall in the town of Maissin, in the north of France, one day in August, 1914. Across the road was a burning house. When the French officer asked them why they were waiting so patiently, they replied that a German had shut their father and mother up in that house and had told them to wait there until they came back to fetch them.

The treatment of children during the German occupation was very terrible. Little tots of four and five, and children on up to the ages of thirteen and fourteen, were forced to work all day for their enslavers. They were taken into the fields at five in the morning and were not allowed to come back until seven in the evening. During all that time they were given only one meal. Their tasks were to dig potatoes, cut away the barbed-wire entanglements and pick up unexploded shells. After the Germans went away there was no milk to be got because all the cows had been either killed or driven away. In one district there were 500 children who existed for months without a single drop of milk. I met one little girl who had been kept for 20 days on a diet consisting of nothing but bread and soup, the latter being watery and scarcely at all nourishing.

The destruction of the schoolhouses has made it impossible for the young children to gain any education. It is no strange thing to encounter a boy or girl of eleven who can neither read nor write. In their hideous thoroughness, the Germans destroyed books, pencils, desks and all. Not a thing was left. After the American relief workers came into the devastated regions they established schools and built little wooden buildings in which to carry on the work.

At one school they told a story of a little girl who was brought in with the other children to learn to read. As soon as she discovered an old chair in one of the corners she immediately got into it and curled up in utter enjoyment and relaxation. She could not be persuaded to get out of that chair. The teacher inquired why she was so pleased with the chair and learned that the household in which the child lived had not boasted a single chair since the first invasion of the Germans.

The separation of the children from their parents is another very tragic occurrence. In the months and years before they are reunited the children grow and change so that they are not recognizable to their parents when they meet again. Some of them, to be sure, wear on a chain about their necks little gold baptismal gifts on which their names are inscribed. But this is exceptional. It is one of the confessed schemes of the Germans to divide and scatter families as much as possible.

My heart bleeds for the children of France! Oh, that they should suffer this unmerited abuse and tribulation!

The deportation of young girls has been systematically practiced. A German officer comes to the front door of a house and orders the entire family to assemble outside on the door step. Then he picks at random a number of the younger women of the family. "I will take you . . . and you . . . and you!" he says, indicating the chosen ones with his forefinger. At this summons they must leave their homes at once. They are not allowed to pack their belongings nor to carry much baggage. They are permitted only so much as they can carry wrapped in a handkerchief.

After they are taken into Germany they are put to work cultivating the fields, doing the hardest and most menial kind of labor. They are forced to live with the soldiers, and are rudely treated by them. They can send no word to their families, and it is almost as though they were dead.

The relief work in the invaded districts has been tireless. Great credit is due to the American committee for devastated France, organized by Miss Anne Morgan. Over 1,000 children have been turned over to this committee to be cared for. One of its most useful works has been in assisting the stricken people to leave their homes so long as there is danger from the Germans in the vicinity. Pitiful stories are told of the flight of these people. One old woman refused to be separated from her goat in transit, and would only consent to go when she could be assured that another goat could be got in case her own was lost.

France has been hard-tried, but she is not broken. Never has the morale of the French people been more unshaken than it is today. France hails with joy the arrival of the Americans. It is most fitting that these great sister republics should be fighting side by side in this hour of stress. Victory will be won; it is inevitable! But ah, the pain, the woe and the unnecessary degradation that have followed in the wake of the invaders! Will the world ever forget these? Can the bitter memory ever be effaced?

THE END OF THE WAR.

A soldier at Camp Grant asked a French lieutenant, who was there as instructor, how much longer the war would last. The Frenchman calmly answered: "Well, I am not sure, but the tenth year will surely be the worst, and after that every seventh year will be bad."

THE VOICE

By HELENA M. KENNEY.

The train rolled slowly out of the station, leaving a girl standing on the platform. Nellie Windsor was fifteen years old. Her mother and father were dead and she had no one but Uncle Jo and Aunt Betty. Uncle Jo had written her to come and live with him—and here she was. It was fully ten minutes before Uncle Jo came, and when he did he gave her a hearty kiss and lifted her into the buggy and off they went. Arriving at the farm, she found Aunt Betty waiting on the porch for her, and such a dear old lady she was. It was then 3:30 o'clock and the rest of the afternoon was spent in unpacking her clothes and learning the rounds of the house. After supper she went directly to bed, because she was tired from her long journey.

The next afternoon she wandered around, picking flowers, chasing butterflies, and, gathering an apron full of apples, she went down to the little brook. It was nice and cool and she was enjoying herself when—"Hello," said a voice. She looked up, but saw no one.

"I say, hello," again came the voice; this time it seemed to come from the tree that was across the brook.

"Hello yourself," replied Nellie. "Where are you?"

"Up here in the tree," said the voice.

"Come down," she said.

"Nope," answered the voice. No amount of teasing would make the voice come down. It was getting late, so Nellie said: "If I come here tomorrow will you let me see who you are?"

"Maybe," replied the voice. So Nellie scampered up the hill and home. But she was not to see the owner of the voice tomorrow, for when she got up the next morning it was raining.

Uncle Jo came in at dinner time with an invitation for Nellie to spend the afternoon with the Browns, who lived across the field. Slowly she went upstairs to dress, sorry because she could not go down to the brook, but maybe it would be there some other time; so with this happy thought in mind she was soon ready, and Uncle Jo took her over to the Browns'. She was rather shy, being among strangers, but Mrs. Brown soon put her at ease. Molly Brown was Nellie's age, and they took to each other right away. While they were sitting talking about nothing in particular the doorbell rang and Molly's mother went and admitted five young people who had come to spend the afternoon. Soon a boy about a year older than herself came in and was introduced as Billy Brown. What a good time she had, and what nice girls and boys they were! But Billy—where had she heard that voice? The afternoon passed all too quickly and when the guests rose to go Mrs. Brown shook hands with them all, and so did Molly and Billy. When Nellie arrived home she could not help thinking what a nice boy Billy was, and she blushed when she thought how he had given her hand a tiny, unnecessary squeeze.

The days that followed were the happiest ones she had ever had. Long rambles with Molly and the Tucker twins, picnics, and often she would go for long walks with Billy. She liked Billy very much and Billy liked Nellie. But she did not forget the voice. Every day she would go down to the brook and talk and talk with it. She would tell it of the nice time she was having, and went so far as to tell it of Billy. Thus two weeks passed on and Nellie thought she was never going to see the voice, when one day the voice told her that she would see it tomorrow, sure. To be sure Nellie was there at the appointed time and the voice said, "If I come down will you promise to give me one thing?"

Wondering what it could be, but curious to see the voice, as she had called it, she readily said, "Yes." It slid down the tree and there stood—Billy!

"You—you—?" she gasped. Billy smiled and said, "Your promise." She was so surprised she did not know what to say. At length she said, "What do you want?"

"A kiss," he replied.

"Oh—h!" and she turned to flee up the hill, but Billy like a flash caught her. It was useless for her to try to get away, even if she wanted to

Here She Goes, There She Goes.

Frank C. Dailey, attorney, tells the following, and vows it is a true tale:

An Indianapolis business man of mature years received a letter from his secretary, and after trying in vain to read the written words told the secretary to send it to Fort Wayne, whence it came, and to inform the sender he had better learn to write.

"But, sir, this is a letter you wrote and sent to Fort Wayne," the secretary replied. "They sent it back, saying they could not make it out."

"Well, send it back and tell them to learn to read," thundered the boss.—Indianapolis News.

Long Picnic.

A number of Muncie men attended a picnic in Greenville, O., one Sunday not long ago at which, according to reports, more than a thousand persons present had a gay time, with all necessary "trimmings" for such an occasion.

"Did you have a good time at the Greenville picnic yesterday?" a young Muncie business man was asked in his office the next day, that being blue Monday.

"I don't know," was the reply; "I'm not home yet."—Indianapolis Star.

TENNESSEE

Interesting Events From all Parts of the State

Camden.—The local board entrained seven men here for Camp Shelby, Hattiesburg, Miss.

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Alamo.—The Alamo high school opened with an enrollment of 265 pupils, the largest number ever enrolled on the first day.

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Knoxville—Sentence of 99 years was given to Everett Dyer, in criminal court, charged with the murder of his wife here several months ago.

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McKenzie.—Miss Mildred Meadors of this place is the first Carroll county girl to volunteer for training in the nurses' reserve corps of the Red Cross.

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Petersburg.—Mrs. Lillian Perrine Davis of Lexington has bought the Petersburg Herald, and has moved here to assume duties as editor and publisher.

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Menglewood.—The store of the Mengle Box company and two residences were destroyed by fire, entailing a loss estimated at $60,000, partly covered by insurance.

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Dyersburg.—The Hosmer hospital of this place was damaged by fire originating from a defective flue. The damage will reach several thousand dollars, it is said.

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Baldwyn.—Melvin Bryson, 4 years old, who was burned when a lamp exploded and covered him with blazing oil as he lay asleep on the floor, died after days of dreadful suffering.

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Knoxville.—George E. West, son of Ed West of Oliver Springs, was killed on the Marne front on July 19, according to a message received from the United States war department by his father.

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Cookeville.—The Tennessee Polytechnic Institute has been approved by the state board of education for the student army training corps which is to be offered to certain schools by the war department.

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Milan.—The Milan chapter of the Red Cross held a sale of articles that were donated by the people, consisting of canned fruits, preserves, fruits, cakes and a small pig, realizing the sum of $106.48.

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Nashville.—Gen. Tully Brown, son of former Gov. Neill S. Brown, and adjutant-general of Tennessee under the Patterson regime, died at his home here after an illness extending over a period of two years.

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Martin.—Rev. E. F. Adams of the First Baptist Church, Fulton, Ky., has been called to the care of the First church here, succeeding Dr. I. N. Penick, who accepted a chair in Union University, Jackson.

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Newbern.—The Dyer County Farm Loan association met and elected the following officers: A. B. Dickerson, president; J. M. Pritchard, vice president; J. C. Doyle, secretary-treasurer; R. E. Rice, attorney.

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Adamsville.—The friends of Chas. M. Kemp, Company B, 121st infantry, Macon, Ga., will be glad to know that that he has recently been promoted to captain. Capt. Kemp is a well known Adamsville boy.

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Nashville.—William F. Price, of West Nashville, drowned Sunday afternoon while trying to save a little girl who stepped off a ledge into water over her head in the Cumberland river near the state penitentiary.

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Lexington.—Rev. J. E. Berktresser, a young Baptist minister of this section, has resigned the care of the church at Spring Creek to enter army Y. M. C. A. work. He is a graduate of Union University, Jackson, Tenn.

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Memphis.—Sunday was the hottest day of the year here, according to the government thermometer, the maximum temperature registering slightly above 99. Only twice since 1900 has this temperature been exceeded. On July 23, 1901, the thermometer showed 104, while on August 3 of the same year 102 was reached. The maximum temperature on June 27, 1914, was 99. A rainfall of .05 of an inch about 5 p.m. brought relief to the sweltering citizens of Memphis.

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The name of Corporal Rufus H. Creel, Memphis, appeared in the casualty list August 10. The dispatch stated that the degree of Creel's wounds had not been determined. A telegram was received by Creel's family to this effect, stating that he is in a base hospital in France, having been wounded on July 18. Creel was 19 years old when he volunteered in the army at the Memphis recruiting station in January, 1917.

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Memphis.—This city has again gone over the top. For two weeks there has been a nation wide campaign for the purpose of enlisting young women in the nurse reserve. The campaign has been under the direction of the woman's committee of the Council of National Defense. Tennessee's quota in this campaign was fixed at 500. Memphis alone has enrolled the names of 245 girls and young women who desire to enter training preparatory to becoming nurses. Of this number 20 are young negro women.